



BOOKS

EDITED BY GEORGE SCIALABBA

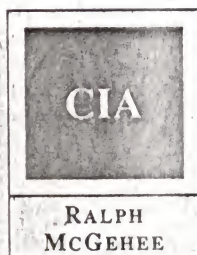


Ralph McGehee on:

- *The Iran Contra Connection* by Marshall, Scott and Hunter. South End Press, 313 pp., \$11.00 paper.
- *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987*, by Bob Woodward. Simon & Schuster, 543 pp., \$21.95.
- *The Iran-Contra Affair, Report of the Joint Congressional Committee*. Government Printing Office, 690 pp., \$29.00.
- *Out of Control* by Leslie Cockburn. Atlantic Monthly Press, 287 pp., \$18.95.

Christopher Hitchens on:

- *The Culture of Terrorism* by Noam Chomsky. South End Press, 268 pp., \$12.00 paper.



THE RECENT outpouring of books on the CIA, its covert operations, and the Iran-Contra scandal, all reveal to a greater or lesser degree the extraordinary impact of our national security state-within-a-state, both on

American society and on the rest of the world. The "secrecy, deception and disdain for the law" (a phrase from the joint Congressional Iran-Contra committee's report) characteristically employed by this entity influences every aspect of our lives. The military/intelligence/corporate complex (hereafter MIC) is gravely damaging our economy and subverting our democratic institutions, including the media, Congress, and the non-national-security elements of the Executive Branch. When its excesses burst upon public consciousness, as in the mid-1970s revelations of the CIA's illegal domestic operations, or in the Iran-Contra scandal, they are "investigated," a few individuals are blamed, and then, unpunished and unreformed, the MIC continues its destructive ways.

As is the case with any independent organism, the MIC's primary motivation is its own survival. To justify their massive budgets, the various intelligence services of the Army, Navy, Air Force, the Defense Department and the CIA all report "intelligence" highlighting exaggerated or contrived threats that demand

bigger budgets and bigger pieces of the action for their parent services. This threat-generating activity is itself a major source of international instability. Noam Chomsky has identified this process as a perverse form of income redistribution, wherein the MIC frightens us with stories of communist/terrorist conspiracies in order to facilitate the robbery of the domestic and Third World poor for the benefit of dominant elites.

Why and how did this dangerous entity come to be? After World War II, the imperial nations of Europe were exhausted and unable to regain control of their former colonial territories. Business interests in the United States determined that the U.S. should take advantage of this situation to create an American-dominated global economy based on surrogate or puppet regimes. Using the rationale of intelligence collation and dissemination, Wall Street lawyers in and (mostly) out of government created the covert arm of this imperial policy—the Central Intelligence Agency.

What are covert operations? In the words of former top CIA official Miles Copeland, they include: "providing secret support to governments or to groups trying to take over a government by force, staging an election, secretly sabotaging the attempts of others to rig an election, or in any way providing such secret support to chosen candidates as will ensure their winning fairly or unfairly; provoking a government into taking some desired action—for example, staging and publishing fake insurgency raids so as to goad the government into escalating its counterinsurgency efforts; black propaganda, i.e., the dissemination of information, true or false, which purports to come from sources other than real ones; discrediting of inimical persons, political groups and other organizations (by poison-pen letters, by forged documents that may be attributed to them, by revelation of embarrassing personal information, etc.); and assassination, sabotage, terrorism, and other such actions which might further some national objective, either offensive or defensive."

Since the late 1940s, CIA covert operations have employed these techniques, often with considerable assistance from other U.S. governmental elements, such as the State Department, the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Agency for International Development (AID), and the military services. In addition to those institutions becoming directly involved in covert policies, the CIA "buries" its personnel in all of them, where they operate secretly.

After the creation of the Agency by the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA conducted guerrilla operations in Poland, the Soviet Union, China, and Albania; it ran paramilitary programs in Angola, Burma, the Congo, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand; it staged and rigged elections in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East; and it used a variety of covert operations to dominate most governments in Latin America. Covert operations expanded even further, under the Eisenhower Administration. During his second term, Eisenhower asked a group of consultants to investigate their impact. Amazingly, the group, led by David Bruce, said the CIA was making mischief all over the world and asked the President to reconsider "programs which find us, involved covertly in the internal affairs of practically every country to which we have access." In its 1961 report, the board declared that CIA covert operations were not worth the risk, money, or manpower involved and detracted "substantially from the CIA's primary intelligence-gathering function."

The problem with this recommendation is that the Agency has always seen its primary function differently—not as intelligence-gathering but as covert operations. As a matter of fact, it is not even particularly good at gathering intelligence. In 1975, the Pike Committee of the House of Representatives investigated the Agency's intelligence product before and during several episodes and concluded that, in every instance, CIA intelligence was either totally lacking or completely inaccurate. An organization cannot be that bad accidentally. The reason for this egregious record is that the Agency serves policy,

not the truth. In a rare moment of candor, CIA Director William Casey asked Bob Woodward: "Why do you think we are here?...We have a chance to establish our own foreign policy. We're on the cutting edge. We are the action agency of the government." Casey, acting on his conviction that the CIA ran foreign policy, cooked intelligence and propagandized the American public to win approval for those policies. But in all this, Casey merely followed the tradition of other Agency directors.

Has the CIA's foreign policy at least been, on its own terms, rational and consistent? In 1975 the Pike Committee concluded that "covert action [has not] been used to assist any particular principled form of government, or identifiable national interest. Covert action as a means for implementing policy reflects a band-aid approach, substituting short-term remedies for problems which require long-term cures."

Leaving aside rationality and consistency, then, has the Agency's foreign policy, at the very least, been effective? After the controversy over the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, McGeorge Bundy, National Security Adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, decried "the dismal historical record of covert military and paramilitary operations over the last 25 years." From the early 1950s until the early 1960s, American activity in South Vietnam consisted chiefly of CIA covert operations aimed at bringing that area under American control. By the time this secret program had clearly failed, American policy was so deeply committed to its goals that there was no alternative but to invade—with what consequences we all know. Even in the mid-1970s, the Senate's Church Committee complained that "Presidents have made excessive and self-defeating use of covert action." [The committee gave a figure of 900 major covert operations and thousands of smaller projects since 1961.] "Covert operations have become a routine program with a momentum of their own and the effects have been increasingly costly to America's interests and reputation."

If CIA operations are so counter-productive, why do all Presidents fall victim to their lure? First, bureaucratic inertia: the self-interest of those in the National Security State. But second, and more important, the CIA serves a crucial function in perpetuating the Cold War. Essentially a propaganda organization, the Agency spends massive amounts of

money developing "anti-Communist" and "anti-terrorist" ideology. It produces and disseminates false media stories and contrived intelligence. It forges documents, plants "Communist" weapon shipments, discredits responsible foreign leaders who are unwilling to follow American orders, and conducts many other sorts of operations aimed at public opinion in target countries. And the impact of those deceptions is multiplied by internal CIA procedures. Applying the principles of "need-to-know" and "compartmentation," the Agency's Operations Directorate does not even advise the Intelligence Directorate of its operations. So the Intelligence Directorate picks up this "black propaganda" and includes it in its own analyses, further misleading and inflaming both elite and popular opinion in the United States.

This is the reality of the secret government, which is dealt with (or, in some cases, not dealt with) by the books under review.

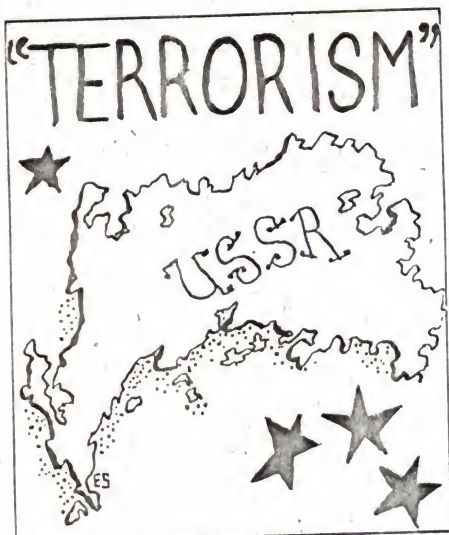


THE IRAN-Contra Connection: *Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era*, by Jonathan Marshall, Peter Dale Scott, and Jane Hunter, was written prior to the Congressional hearings, but is frequently prescient. Although it is difficult to evaluate some of its more arcane information, e.g., on the

Italian P-2, the "Shadow Networks," the secret and extensive role of Israel, the World Anti-Communist League, and other elements in the furtive world of right-wing politics, both the preface and the concluding chapters show especial clarity and offer ominous, and quite appropriate warnings if the lessons of Iran-gate remain unlearned.

Jonathan Marshall, in a chapter called "The Deeper Malady," focuses on the Reagan Administration's domestic propaganda campaign to persuade the nation of the virulent menace of foreign terrorism. He includes details of Casey's campaign to mislead the American press about Libya by planting false stories abroad. These stories accused Gadhafi of supporting slave traffic, mismanaging the Libyan economy, and stirring up terrorism. *Newsweek* reported that Gadhafi had hatched a plot to assassinate President Reagan. The reports reached absurd levels when *The New York Times* on 4 December 1981 published an Administration claim that "five terrorists trained in Libya entered the United States last weekend with plans to assassinate President Reagan and other senior officials. A huge nationwide search for the potential assassins" was underway. Only much later, in the context of the Iran arms scandal, did it emerge that the source of the fanciful "hit squad" story was Manucher Ghorbanifar, a former Iranian SAVAK agent with close ties to Israeli intelligence. Meanwhile, of course, much of the groundwork had been laid for the murderous American air raid on Tripoli in April 1986.

Peter Dale Scott places the current era in historic context. He addresses the seeming paradox that it was liberal democracies that took the lead in imperial expansion. It is striking, he argues, how brief was the period of vanguard imperial hegemony, and how costly to the economic base of the mother country. Especially when set against the examples of Germany and Japan, the depressing examples of modern England and Spain are memorials to empire's appalling erosion of both cultural dynamism and parliamentary institutions. They illustrate not only the crippling costs of maintaining military hegemony, but also the resultant flight of capital and entrepreneurship out of the home political economy. Scott concludes that this calculus is unfavorable even before we take into account the overwhelming cost to the colonized people.



VEIL: *The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987* is a fascinating but deceptive account of Agency operations in the Casey era. In a way, the book represents Casey's legacy to the right wing of American politics. The Reagan Administration has all along been trying to make covert operations more acceptable to the public. Whatever Woodward's intentions, *Veil* will further this effort. The book adds little to what is already known, and conveys much misinformation. One loses a great deal of respect for Woodward's investigative abilities as a result of his blind acceptance of many of Casey's tales. In intelligence jargon, Woodward "fell in love with his agent."

For example, *Veil* claims that the National Security Agency (NSA) does not intercept overseas communications by U.S. citizens unless they are involved in espionage or criminal activity. In view of Executive Directive 12333 of December 1981, which in effect authorizes domestic intelligence operations, this statement seems dubious. Any activity opposed by the Administration can be labeled espionage or criminal, and thereby made a legitimate collection target. (This reviewer, for example, learned that his phone was tapped only when the monitor broke into a conversation and began indignantly contradicting him.) In the past the NSA has not hesitated to intercept communications of American citizens, even when this violated the law. With the legal authority of Executive Order 12333, the NSA probably gives blanket coverage to all international communications, including those of U.S. citizens.

Veil conveys the impression that it is a more or less comprehensive account of CIA covert operations in the 1980s,

Yet it makes little mention of the CIA's operations within academia, publishing, or other domestic disinformation assets. Nor does Woodward discuss the Agency's operations at the United Nations, or its contacts with ethnic groups, and he merely notes in passing its illegal propaganda operations aimed at Congress. Finally, Woodward deals only with the better-known foreign CIA operations and does not even allude to the many other covert actions (probably hundreds) conducted on Casey's watch.

One of the most misleading sections of *Veil* is the one on international terrorism. Woodward notes that the CIA prepared a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) entitled "Soviet Support for International Terrorism." This is how he refers to the episode: "On May 27, (1981) the secret estimate was issued and stated that the Soviets were not the hidden hand behind international terrorism.... That estimate was classified secret. Neither it nor its conclusions was made public."

But there is much more to the story. Around the same time, Secretary of State Haig announced that the incoming Administration would change the highest declared priority of American foreign policy from concern for human rights to action against international terrorism. New CIA director Casey concurred. But within a few months, an interagency working group produced a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on international terrorism. Casey rejected the first drafts of the NIE, which said there was no such thing as "international terrorism," only scattered groups with their own agendas, who posed no significant threat and with whom the Soviets were rarely involved. Casey insisted that the NIE be revised. The head of the CIA's intelligence arm, Bruce Clark, resigned and a new estimate was written that counted not only terrorist acts but also criminal activities and mere threats. The revised NIE also said that the Soviets' support for wars of national liberation made them a moving force behind international terrorism—a complete reversal of the judgment in the first drafts. In June 1981, the CIA distributed the revised study, "Patterns of International Terrorism: 1980." Woodward entirely overlooks this published estimate, which set off an Administration orgy of disinformation about the "evil empire's" terrorist activities.

Woodward falls for CIA propaganda in another key instance as well. Accord-

ing to *Veil*, "CIA reports showed that plane-loads of weapons had been delivered to the Salvadoran rebels from neighboring Nicaragua.... The evidence was an intelligence windfall in the diaries and papers of the secretary general of the small El Salvadoran Communist-Party, Shafik Handal. They had recounted trips to the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, other Soviet Bloc countries and Cuba; agreements had been reached on ammunition and medical supplies to be shipped through Cuba and Nicaragua.... It was a near-perfect case, painting a paper picture of Communist global conspiracy that conformed with Casey's predisposition."

But Woodward ignores the fact that Shafik Handal's diaries were fairly obvious forgeries, probably the work of the CIA's Technical Services Staff. The writing in Handal's diaries appears in three distinct styles. Woodward fails to mention the doubts raised about the diaries' authenticity by his own newspaper, the *Washington Post*. The *Wall Street Journal* likewise questioned the diaries' authenticity, and Philip Agee published a detailed exposure of the forgery in his book, *White Paper Whitewash*. In general, *Veil* conveys the impression that there were large arms shipments from the Sandinistas to the Salvadoran leftists. This contention ignores the widely publicized testimony before the World Court of David MacMichael, a former CIA intelligence analyst, that the Agency had no evidence of any such shipments.

It was Casey who, in 1985, ordered four National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) on Nicaragua that sounded these false alarms. Reducing the four documents to a single sentence for our illiterate President's daily briefing, Casey wrote: "The Soviet Union and Cuba have established and consolidated a beachhead, put hundreds of millions of dollars behind...aggressive subversion." Woodward records that charge without comment, as if genuine. Casey also used the Agency's intelligence responsibility in other areas to push his policies, especially regarding Mexico, in this case leading to the resignation in protest of John Horton, the Agency's National Intelligence Officer for Latin America. In fact, as I have already suggested, Casey distorted CIA intelligence in virtually every instance in which he wanted to influence U.S. foreign policy—Grenada, Libya, El Salvador, and more.

As I have also pointed out, this was nothing new. CIA Directors have again and again employed such methods to generate prospective or retrospective support for CIA covert operations. Allen Dulles, revered in intelligence circles as "the father of the CIA," suppressed information about Castro's popularity to win approval for the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. William Colby consistently suppressed intelligence that accurately portrayed the strength of the Communist movement in Vietnam and the weakness of successive U.S. puppet governments. These and other examples demonstrate that the CIA is an active player, not merely a resource for democratically accountable policy-makers. And in the novel guise of an expose, *Veil* continues the tradition of Agency directors disseminating domestic misinformation.



OUT OF CONTROL, by Leslie Cockburn, deals almost exclusively with Irangate and the contra drug connection. The book presents a definite challenge to the analytical abilities of readers. The mass of detail and the intricate tapestry of claims and counter-claims require an immense amount of time and effort to digest. These problems are exacerbated by an inadequate table of contents and the lack of numbered footnotes or an index (all nearly unforgivable sins in the opinion of this reviewer, who is also researching these topics). Still, these deficiencies notwithstanding, *Out of Control* is an important book.

At first, Cockburn's charges of Agency involvement in contra drug trafficking may seem hard to credit. She refers to "the role of the CIA and the related White House covert operations network in drenching America in cocaine and other narcotics." But drug-trafficking has attended all major CIA paramilitary operations. In the early 1970s, the CIA's

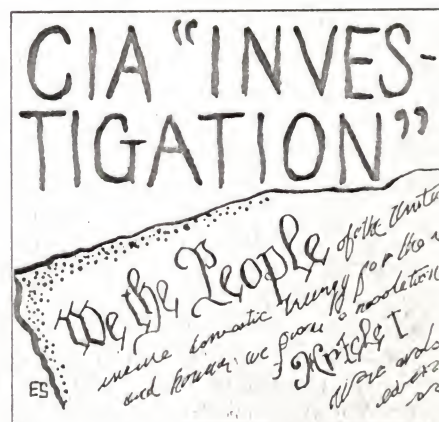
Inspector General investigated similar charges in relation to the secret war on Laos, and found they were true. The Drug Enforcement Agency reported in 1983 that most of the drugs coming into the eastern United States came through groups whom the CIA supports in Afghanistan. There is little reason to believe that the same is not happening with the contras. What is surprising in this case is the blatancy of the activity. According to Cockburn's sources—two foreign mercenaries with the contras—the American "rancher" in Costa Rica, John Hull, was directly involved in the guns-for-drugs traffic. The same sources claimed that Hull told them he was the contra-CIA liaison in Costa Rica, that he received \$10,000 a month from the National Security Council to maintain and supply two contra camps, and that he received his orders from the CIA station chief in Costa Rica, who in turn reported on his activities to the CIA's Deputy Director of Operations.

Out of Control details the CIA's illegal attempts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, including Operation Elephant Herd, authorized by President Reagan in June 1983, to get around Congressional restrictions on aid. The operation was used to avoid budget limits and channeled military equipment on a "surplus" or no cost basis to the contras. The book also records the links between many of those involved on the fringes of CIA operations against Nicaragua: Tom Posey, organizers of the "volunteer" group Civilian Military Assistance; Sam Hall, the soldier of fortune who was arrested in Nicaragua when he casually took a taxi to collect intelligence on a military target; John Hull; Joe Fernandez, the CIA Chief of Station in San Jose; Robert Owen, North's gofer; and a number of other notorious or merely odd characters.

Out of Control provides details of an Agency operation to stage a bombing of the U.S. Embassy in San Jose as a pretext for an American invasion of Nicaragua. Although such techniques are a standard part of the Agency's *modus operandi*, the further revelation that this operation was meant to include the assassination of American Ambassador Lewis Tambs surprised even seasoned CIA-watchers. Cockburn also furnishes a well-documented account of the La Penca bombing, designed to assassinate Eden Pastora, who was then blocking CIA efforts to consolidate the contras. This bombing, which killed

several Costa Rican journalists and injured American journalist Tony Avirgan, generated the Christic Institute lawsuit against many members of the unofficial "secret team."

Cockburn's careful (though necessarily limited) investigation of the Congressional Iran-contra committee demonstrates that, in reality, it avoided the most sensitive issues of Presidential knowledge and accountability and skirted the explosive question of CIA violations of Congressional prohibitions on aiding the contras. One wishes (in vain, of course) that the Committee would reconvene and begin a genuine investigation, using *Out of Control*, as a starting point.



READING THE Committee's recently released official report, *The Iran-Contra Affair*, one can only conclude that it was determined not to dig too deeply, not to rock the boat. One easily gets lost—and is perhaps meant to—in its repetition of details already heard during the televised hearings. Though the executive summary of the report details grave violations of the law and the Constitution—that individuals in the CIA violated the Boland Amendment; that Casey tailored intelligence to support his own policy preferences; that the Administration directed a domestic disinformation campaign; that Casey's "off-the-shelf, stand-alone" covert capacity had actually become operational; that the Administration relegated sensitive diplomatic negotiations to private citizens; and, that the entire Iran-contra operation took place in an atmosphere of "secrecy, deception and disdain for the law"—the Committee refused to face up to their implications. It acknowledged the need to separate the intelligence and policy functions, since "otherwise, there is too great a risk that the interpretation of intelligence will be

skewed to fit predetermined policy choices." But its recommendations were largely cosmetic—mere tinkering.

As Cockburn points out, the Committee aggressively avoided developing evidence of CIA violations of the Boland amendment. Nevertheless, its chapter on Secord's and Hakim's "Enterprise" includes detailed information on this operational "stand-alone, off-the-shelf, covert capability that would act throughout the world while evading Congressional review." North suggested establishing reserve funds for a number of special Enterprise activities, including recovery of military equipment, setting up propaganda operations in foreign countries, and influencing domestic politics in foreign countries. The report shows that every single source of Enterprise income involved North and the use of U.S. Government resources—in effect, the Enterprise was a commercial cutout for the CIA. Other information has since suggested that Secord was actually a CIA agent throughout the entire Irangate operation.

The Committee did a good job of tracking down the numerous subsidiaries of the Enterprise but failed to point out that there was absolutely nothing new in these mechanisms. The CIA has over the years employed proprietary companies to perform in its name. The only new factor was Casey's use of North as a CIA case officer, thereby providing one additional level of "plausible deniability." After supplying so much remarkable detail on the Enterprise, it is hard to fathom how the Committee could abdicate its responsibility to investigate the CIA's central role in Irangate—but it did.

The report's chapter on "Covert Action in a Democratic Society" is a demonstration of either massive ignorance or dangerous dissembling. It claims that "experience has shown that [current laws governing CIA operations], if respected are adequate to the task." This statement ignores the Agency's entire deceitful history. The Committee had only to read the Senate Church Committee report of 1976 to encounter volumes of data on illegal Agency operations, which suggest a rather different conclusion. The same chapter also states that peacetime covert action became an instrument of U.S. foreign policy in response to the expansion of Soviet political and military influence following World War II. The

Committees could have read the National Security Act of 1947 that established the CIA to collate and disseminate intelligence. Or it might have consulted National Security Decision Memorandum 40, which made clear that covert action was to be employed primarily to facilitate American foreign policy objectives, independently of any Soviet threat.

Finally, the report notes the misuse of Presidential findings, which were drawn so broadly that they became a blank check and defeated the notion of Presidential accountability.

After all these observations, the Committee suggested "a renewal of the commitment to constitutional government and sound processes of decision-making" and advised (pleaded) that the Administration not lie to Congress. To enforce these stern words the Committee made 27 superficial recommendations—of which the two most substantive were immediately violated. The Committee recommended that, as a matter of principle, the National Security Adviser should not be an active-duty military officer. Before the ink on the report was dry, President Reagan named Lt. Gen. Colin L. Powell, an active-duty officer, to be his National Security Adviser. The Committee also recommended that the CIA Inspector General be confirmed by the Senate, but new Agency director William Webster protested that he could be trusted to appoint a responsible individual.

The overall feeling one comes away with after reading the report is that it tells much, avoids much more, and will result in nothing at all.

STILL, SOME people seem to have woken up. On December 13, 1987, nationally syndicated columnist Colman McCarthy—who is certainly no radical—published a column entitled "The Consequences of Covert Tactics." Noting the claim of several former CIA officials, now critics of the Agency, that six million people have been killed as a result of CIA covert actions, along with millions of other wounded or terrorized, McCarthy concludes: "Working to eliminate covert action, or even closing the agency, is worthy only in the way that subduing a crazed hostage-holding gunman is. It's a stance of basic revulsion against a policy of death. The radical position, as against the safely responsible one, is to work for the kind of America that won't put protecting its

excessive power ahead of the needs of the world's powerless. We may then see that the country's vaunted 'vital interests' were really its vital excesses.

"To eliminate the CIA means a willingness to devise a new economic and political system that opposes the planet's poverty, disease and famine with the fervor that the current system battles communism. No CIA, nor any other violence-dealing agency, would be needed for that. The operations would be overt."

One can only rub one's eyes in amazement and murmur, "Amen."



CHRISTOPHER
HITCHENS

LIONEL TRILLING once wrote a short essay on the problem of "we." Apparently, whenever he said of a novel or other work under review that it engaged "our" sympathy, or that "we"

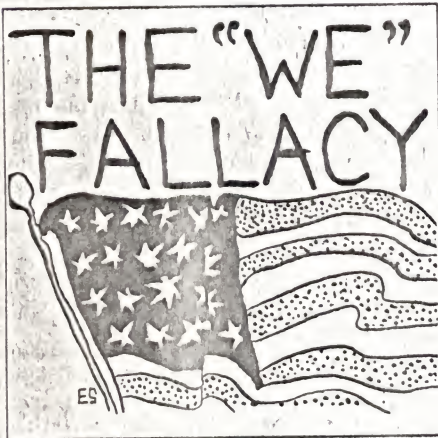
felt repelled by the author's assumptions, he would receive letters of complaint. Who was this "we," the letter writers demanded to know, and what allowed Trilling to speak for "us" in this way?

The literary critic's experience may not seem immediately relevant to contemporary politics. But as one surveys the dismal field of political commentary, it is hard not to conclude that half the cretinism of the mainstream media is attributable to the "we" fallacy. This is especially true in any discussion of imperialism. There is talk of "our" interests, "our" credibility, and "our" will. Unexamined, this usage also infects the vocabulary and thinking of those who fancy themselves liberals. Watch some anguished isolationist as he or she shuffles across an op-ed page, for example, or listen to some Congressperson on *Nightline* struggle to make a case against aid to the contras. Invariably he or she will end up apologizing and bleating meekly that the laying waste of Nicaragua is "not in our best interests." Occasionally the phrase "the American people" is intoned: this, too, carries the suggestion that society is a family or a voluntary association. Unless one is armed in some fashion against the subtle operation on the mind of this consensus-fabricating syntax, one can end up saying, or letting pass without challenge, the most hateful and nonsensical things. What Democratic politician

these days would think twice about referring to "our" nuclear weapons?

Noam Chomsky's latest book has many merits, but I think its foremost virtue is the way in which it exposes this linguistic and ideological fraud. Chomsky writes ruthlessly and forensically about the operations of empire, and about the cast of mind which underpins empire while simultaneously denying its existence. In a 1927 book, *Men of Destiny*, Walter Lippmann wrote: "All the world thinks of the United States today as an empire, except the people of the United States. We shrink from the word 'empire,' and insist that it should not be used to describe the dominion we exercise from Alaska to the Philippines, from Cuba to Panama, and beyond. We feel that there ought to be some other name for the civilizing work which we do so reluctantly in these backward countries."

Most of what passes for educated opinion today is at a lower level of self-knowledge on this question than even



Walter Lippmann (though you'll notice his grandiloquent "we") half a century ago. Chomsky does not cite Lippmann on empire, but he does refer to an intellectual construct that Lippmann originated in order to cope with empire's domestic political consequences. That construct was "the manufacture of consent." This potent idea has been refined and developed with resources of propaganda and communication undreamt of by its pioneers. The novelist Ian McEwan has described watching audience behavior on daytime TV as "the democrat's pornography." But what word should be applied to a public opinion that is, on one day, asked to get excited about Lebanon—a country of which it knows virtually nothing; on the next day, commanded to

view the dispatch of American troops there as a test of will in a battle for the survival of the West; and the day after that, ordered to forget the whole episode? And in each case, complies? This is not so much the prostitution of democracy as its sheer negation.

The Culture of Terrorism is a sustained and rigorous engagement with this problem; and all those who hope to defeat the Right by patiently educating public opinion have a duty to read and discuss it. The very word "terrorism," of course, as ubiquitous as it is misleading, is an example of the power of official propaganda and of the collusion of mass academia and the mass media with that power. In my view, "terrorism" is a vacuous term, which trades on the cheapest moralism for its (diminishing) effect. I have serious doubts about Chomsky's persistent attempt to use the word ironically, and so turn it upon its manipulators. Still, he slays an impressive number of hypocritical pawns by playing his rather straightforward "double standard" move against the official gambit. The following extract shows his method: "Critics of Reaganite aggressiveness can perceive that Nicaragua may also have some concerns. Discussing the diplomatic alternative that he favors, Wayne Smith, one of the strongest and most consistent critics of the contra option, urges that we enter into a bilateral security pact with Nicaragua as 'a corollary to the Central American treaty itself': 'Of course, we would want adequate means of verification. So would the Sandinistas, who have no more reason to trust us than we have to trust them. Compliance would be assured not by the contras but by the strength and honor of the United States.'

"In short, our strength will assure their compliance, and our honor will assure our compliance, thus allaying Nicaraguan concerns. Recall that we are inspecting the outer limits of expressible dissent."

This is excellent, right down to its modest and proper use, in the last sentence, of "we" to mean no more than "those who have followed my argument this far."

I have tried once or twice in columns of mine to float the phrase "superpower self-pity," in an effort to describe a mentality upon which Chomsky expends much ink. My hope was to capture a pose that is very common among neoconservative intellectuals. These fretful types affect to believe that mass

academia and the mass media are instinctively un- or anti-American. They write as though Congress spent all its time trying to thwart the purposes of the military-industrial complex—in a particularly brazen instance, the *New Republic's* Charles Krauthammer referred to "the imperial Congress." They even allege that the mainstream press has a bias against Israel. (I cite these charges in ascending order of implausibility.)

At one level, Chomsky has no difficulty in refuting these warped and paranoid notions. He readily disposes of canards like that propounded by contra apologist Robert Leiken, who writes darkly about the "well-organized network of 'opposition' figures, 'witnesses,' 'correspondents,' and professional writers of letters to editors." Perhaps only those of us who have toiled in this vineyard know quite how feeble a counterweight to state lying this "well-organized network" has provided. As for the inveterate oppositionism of the media—well, Chomsky has done his homework, as usual. In the first three months of 1986, as Congress deliberated aid to the contras, *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* published eighty-five opinion pieces on the issue by their regular columnists and other contributors. These articles, like a *Nightline* show, ran the gamut from A to C. Not one of them failed to excoriate the Sandinista government, as a necessary prologue to (or qualification for) taking part in the "debate" in the first place. Small wonder that by late in the year Congress had, in effect, arrogated to itself the right to change the government of Nicaragua, and was wrangling solely over the means by which to do so.

Chomsky is undoubtedly justified in his relentless harrying of this servile conformity. Still, I am left with a question. If the media are such lapdogs, why do the Reaganites dislike them so? This is not merely a matter of Leiken's and other contra supporters' absurd claims, but of a whole pattern of press-hatred harking back at least as far as the "stab in the back" fantasies of those who believe that the liberals "lost" Indochina. Chomsky might well reply that this is no more than irrational ingratitude on the Reaganites' part, given the generally patriotic way in which the press has played down such matters as the "secret" blitz of Cambodia. But while, at many points he writes of the press "obediently" playing its "allotted"

role, at many other points he will cite a report from an organ of respectable opinion in order to underline an argument of his own. Many radicals, I suspect, have had similar experiences. I myself read nothing in the left press in 1987 as damning about the contras as Rod Norland's *Newsweek* article (quoted by Chomsky). This first-hand report came complete with photographic evidence that U.S. helicopters were flying illegal missions with false Red Cross markings.

Elsewhere, Chomsky is hasty. He writes that the 1986 Reykjavik summit was "widely portrayed in the United States as a great triumph for Reagan" and that there was no mention here of a USIA report which showed European opinion blaming Reagan for the Reykjavik breakdown. Of his first observation, I can only say that I don't remember it like that. Of his second: I can remember a syndicated column of William Buckley raising the alarm at USIA's findings and deploring European gullibility. Those would be the merest quibbles, if Chomsky did not argue that there is an almost "totalitarian" system of thought control in this country.

Now of course it is true that a fair job of mind-bending gets done. I regularly win bets with "experts" at dull Washington parties by asking which country has the largest military base in Cuba and which country is geographically closest to the U.S. after Canada and Mexico. (Answers: respectively, the U.S. and the USSR.) The very shape of the known world has had to be distorted, in a sort of imperial Mercator projection of the mind, in order to fit superpower delusions and to intensify their vulgar emotional counterpart, which is provincial fear. The United States has an isolationist and insular culture, combined with a global and interventionist posture. This highly dangerous and febrile mixture, which greatly facilitates the task of the fear-mongers and chauvinists, needs a very exact and nuanced diagnosis. I don't think that analogies from the totalitarian model, however suggestive, are sufficient.

Another instance: despite a fantastic barrage of admittedly Goebbels-like broadcasts by Reagan and disinformation stunts by his underlings, the American public has fairly consistently opposed aid to the contras by roughly two to one. There have been some lurches on this chart, notably after Grenada and after North's televised free-associat-

ing; but in general, Reagan's favorite policy has been his least popular one with an electorate that allegedly trusts him. Why is this? Is it humane good sense? No doubt this counts for something; but I suspect that on the day after an actual invasion of Nicaragua, opinion polls would favor the landing. Is it a legacy of Vietnam? Probably it is, in part, but this too cuts both ways—there are those who say: "No more Vietnams, unless we mean to win." Why, then? Of this urgent question for democrats, Chomsky writes, in his treatment of the North spasm: "But at a deeper level, the immediate public response illustrates the insight of the 18th-century European Enlightenment that the value and meaning of freedom are learned through its exercise, and that the instinctive desire of 'all free peoples to guard themselves from oppression' (Rousseau) may be repressed among a subordinated population, effectively removed from the political system, disengaged from the struggle against state and other authority, and in general, objects rather than agents. In the absence of organizational forms that permit meaningful participation in political and other social institutions, a distinct from following orders or ratifying decisions made elsewhere, the 'instinct for freedom' may wither, offering opportunities for charismatic leaders to rally mass popular support, with consequences familiar from recent history."

That there is much truth in this analysis, it would be irresponsible to deny. There was more than a hint, from the few revelations offered in the Iran-contra hearings, that the rulers of this country cherish a vision of the future that is modelled on their extensive acquaintance with juntas and plebiscites. But then why, despite an invertebrate Congress and a complicit press, did we witness the rapid collapse of North's public esteem? I think Chomsky's account of the "manufacture of consent" falls short of being exhaustive here. His practice of saying "the press" and "the media," as if these formed an organic whole, leads to some of the difficulties I have sketched. Might it not make sense to regard the mass communications industry as an area of contestation, in which the ruling class naturally holds most of the cards, but in which no definitively or universally predictable result can be arranged? The regnant ideology, which is one of liberalism and "objectivity," is only difficult to read because it denies that it is

an ideology. Once one can parse the "we" word, one begins to see through the near-automatic deference shown by our organs of news and opinion to the powers that be. And a large number of people—including some who work in the media—are shrewd enough to do this for themselves, at least some of the time. If they were not, then disinformation campaigns like the Reagan Administration's "Operation Truth" would be unnecessary.

I HAVE ASSUMED throughout this review that any likely reader of *Z* will recognize international aggression when he or she sees it. Even so, and my criticisms notwithstanding, Chomsky has mustered evidence and argument that vastly extend and refine our understanding of the attack on Nicaragua. Several sections of *The Culture of Terrorism* approach the sustained brilliance with which he dismembered the report of the Kahan Commission, in what was perhaps the finest chapter of his earlier *Fateful Triangle*. Chomsky proceeds on the almost unthinkable subversive assumption that the United States should be judged by the same standards that it preaches (often at gunpoint) to other nations—he is nearly the only person now writing who assumes a single standard of international morality not for rhetorical effect, but as a matter of habitual, practically instinctual conviction.

Next time you are arguing about Central America and its "crisis," ask your opponents when, in their opinion, the crisis began. It is a near certainty that they will date its advent from some time in the Carter Administration. When Central America was "our" sweltering, murderous backyard, untroubled by mass insurgency, the attention paid to it by the Establishment and the press was, quite simply, nil. The abundant coverage today is morally little better than the zero coverage of yesterday—almost without exception, it shares our rulers' view that the U.S. owns the isthmus and need only pay attention when that ownership is in dispute. Inasmuch as he allows us to judge the political system by its effects rather than its self-image—and also because he reminds us of our civic duty, in a case of aggression, to take the side of the victim—Chomsky's dissection of this ideological pathology is exemplary. ZEND

"Books," edited by George Scialabba, will appear in *Z* every month.